

EXTREMIST DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative perspective of a sample of deradicalisation programmes in various parts of the world. Deradicalisation is conceptualized as the unraveling of “radicalization”- as a process in which individuals proceed from the state of passivity to radicalism through the adoption of extremist ideology while gradually increasing the likelihood of their involvement in violent radical behavior. The programmes reviewed cover a wide range of political, cultural and religious backgrounds from the Scandinavian countries to continental Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia as well as Australia. Special attention is given to deradicalisation processes in prisons around the world.

KEYWORDS: Deradicalisation Programmes, Radicalisation

INTRODUCTION

The term “deradicalisation” is often used to describe both the processes and outcomes of measures, policies and actual programmes aimed at reversing or at least reducing the effect of “radicalisation”.¹ In general, “radicalism” could be defined as the “pursuit of and support for far-reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to the democratic legal order through the threat or use of violence or other undemocratic means”.² The degree of radicalisation differs from person to person. Radicalisation could be non-violent restricted to only holding “radical” ideas otherwise referred to as ‘cognitive radicalisation’. In its most extreme manifestations radicalism could lead one to feel the need for supporting and even participating in violent acts including terrorism to achieve the desired objectives. McCauley and Moskaleiko refer to the former as “opinion radicalisation” and the latter as “action radicalisation”.³

The reversal of the radicalisation process i.e. deradicalisation is a process that seeks to convince the targets of the programme to both disengage from violence or the support for it at the minimum or where feasible, guide them to gradually unlearn and reject the fundamental assumptions and ideas that contributed to their radicalisation. The task of the counsellor in a deradicalisation programme is therefore first to identify or “extricate” the specific radical ideas that have lead to an individual’s radicalisation and then expose the weaknesses in the subjects’ logic (or their interpretations of

¹As is the case with many other terms in social sciences, seldom does one find unanimous agreement on the meanings or definitions of various important terms, and these two are not exceptions. Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 no. 4 (2010).

²Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (ITAC), "Militant Jihadism: Radicalization, Conversion, Recruitment," in *Trends in Terrorism Series* ed. The Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies - The Norman Petterson School of International Affairs (Canada: Carleton University, 2006), p. 2. Definition adapted from Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations Report, "From Dawa to Jihad. The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order", (2005), p. 13.

³Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskaleiko, "Recent U.S. Thinking About Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Baby Steps Towards a Dynamic View of Asymmetric Conflict," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010).

religious texts) with the aim of guiding them to “negate” their radical ideology.⁴

Unraveling the effects of the radicalisation process also requires that attention be paid to the actual dynamics within the radical group(s) which the individual identifies with. According to Bjørge and Horgan, the most useful of government policies and programmes aimed at deradicalisation of extremists are those that are able to exploit the tensions within the groups in which the radical individual belong or identify with.⁵ While the conventional view has been that “religious terrorists would be so steadfast” evidence from a variety of Muslim countries today indicates the contrary to be true. Drawing from their findings from various interviews with members of terrorist organisations around the world, Horgan and Bjørge write, “We quickly came to the realization that disengagement from terrorist and other violent movements was in fact a normal and almost constant process”.⁶ Most individuals involved in terrorism “eventually disengage from it in one way or another” and few terrorist movements “last more than a few months, in rare cases years, before coming to an end”.⁷

In cases involving salafi-jihadism, efforts at countering ideological radicalisation mainly target theological interpretations of religious texts which present “armed confrontation with political rivals” as a “theologically legitimate and instrumentally efficient method for social change”.⁸ According to Ashour, deradicalisation has three main dimensions: ideological, behavioural and organisational. Ideological deradicalisation involves the reversal of the radical ideology which entails delegitimation of armed methods to achieve political goals and the acceptance of gradual socio-political change in a pluralist context. However, Ashour cautions that deradicalisation does not require that one accepts democratic methods. The latter is a separate process which we may refer to as ‘moderation’.⁹ Secondly, ‘behavioural deradicalisation’ is said to occur when the radical individual or group chooses to abandon the use of violence as a tactic without necessarily delegitimising it from the ideological point of view. Finally, ‘organisational deradicalisation’ is when a whole radical organisation abandons the use of violence, disarm and demobilize. When the process is successful in all these three dimensions then we have ‘comprehensive deradicalisation’.¹⁰

As regards to the scope of the process, deradicalisation efforts could be aimed at whole groups or individual terrorists or radicals. Examples of cases of group deradicalisation could be found in Libya (deradicalisation efforts and negotiations between the Libyan government and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, LIFG), Algeria (with the Islamic Salvation Army or AIS, Armed Islamic Group or GIA and the Group for Preaching and Combat or GSPC), Egypt (with al-Gama’a al-Islamiyyah or Islamic Group IG) or Tajikistan (with the Islamic Renaissance Party, IRP).¹¹ On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Australia, Yemen and Indonesia are among countries with deradicalisation programmes that mainly focus on reversing individual radicalisation. While recognizing that both group and individual deradicalisation programmes are equally significant and share several aspects, the ensuing paragraphs are mainly dedicated to examine

⁴ Kumar Ramakrishna, “Counter-Ideological Work’ in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 4, no. 2 (2009): p. 47.

⁵ Tore Bjørge and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind : Individual and Collective Disengagement*, Political Violence (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009). Foreword.

⁶ Ibid. Preface.

⁷ ———, “Introduction,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørge and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Omar Ashour, “Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformation of Armed Islamist Movements,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 3 (2011).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

issues pertaining to deradicalisation in prisons and hence pay more attention to the deradicalisation of individual radicals or convicted terrorists.

Deradicalisation is a complex phenomenon. Undoing the effects of the confluence of various radicalising factors is not an easy task by any stretch of imagination. This is further compounded by the absence of and difficulties involved in developing valid and reliable methods for appraising the effectiveness of deradicalisation programmes over the medium and long term.¹² However, identifying the key aspects of the problem at hand i.e. radicalisation is a useful starting point in the right direction. Radicalisation is a complex process that results from the confluence of a wide range of internal (thoughts and feelings) and external (physical and environmental) factors.¹³ Among the most stated factors that contribute to an individual's radicalisation include perceived sense of injustice (often without a fully elaborated ideology), insecurity, threats (perceived or real) to one's own group or community, the need for meaning or "clear explanation of what the world is all about and what one's own role is within it".¹⁴ Other factors include ideological extremism, peer pressure, charismatic leaders, media violence, child abuse, cultural norms, structural violence, domestic and international political events, government repression, sympathy for the "victimised", curiosity, search for excitement, search for friends or a community, search for status or identity, etc.¹⁵ The availability of an organising space and access to deadly weapons provides an opportunity for radical ideas to be translated into violent actions.¹⁶

Recognising the social and psychological functions of radical groups is significant in the deradicalisation process. The rehabilitation team would need to facilitate the unlearning process while minimising its psychological and social impact on the individual going through rehabilitation. For instance, if the search for status and identity was a prime motivator for an individual to join an extremist group, due respect needs to be shown to the inmates during any dialogue with the religious and other counsellors so as to maintain the feeling of mutual respect between the parties. In recognition of this fact, the Yemeni religious rehabilitation programme officially developed what they call "Ethics of Dialogue". In accordance to these, the religious scholars counseling the extremist and terrorist inmates in Yemeni prisons are required to show mutual respect; accept multiplicity and commitment to disagreement ethics; provide the inmates their due freedom to express their point of view; equality in speech using revision and references; avoid boring long speech and interruption; good presentation by using good phrases; good listening and respect of the opinion of the other; self control and avoidance of negative reaction; being patient, honest and humble; considering the feelings of the other and avoiding 'irony'; and Organising ideas according to the subjects to be discussed.¹⁷

¹²Ramakrishna, "'Counter-Ideological Work' in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment."

¹³Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun, *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009), Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Terrorist Campaigns End," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁴Ineke van der Valk, Willem Wagenaar, and Froukje Demant, "The Extreme Right: Entry and Exit," in *Racism & Extremism Monitor* (Anne Frank House, 2010 http://www.annefrank.org/ond_upload/Downloads/EntryAndExit.pdf). On this point, Valk et al draw from F. J. Buijs, F. Demant, and A. Hamdy, *Strijders Van Eigen Bodem: Radicale En Democratische Moslims in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

¹⁵Valk, Wagenaar, and Demant, "The Extreme Right: Entry and Exit." See also T. Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators, and Responses* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1997).

¹⁶Tod Schneider, *Transcending Violence: Understanding the Roots of Violence and Cultivating Peace in Our Nations, Our Communities and Our Hearts* (Victoria, B.C., Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2002).

¹⁷Christopher Boucek, "Extremist Re-Education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

It is also important to recognise the influence of powerlessness, individual and social exclusion, trauma and humiliation which contribute to the radicalisation process in the first place.¹⁸ As Schneider observes, the radicalising agents often tap into these various psychological and social sources of “energy” and attempt to convince their targets that the world is scary and dangerous; that violence is ideologically (or religiously) justified; that violence is the only effective means to confront the present challenges i.e. there are no alternatives to the use of violence; and that the individual’s and his or her community’s survival are at stake and urgent action is necessary. Subsequently, the Consequences of engaging in illegal violence are brushed off and training is provided for willing recruits.¹⁹

Studies have shown that in some cases the role of psychological factors may outweigh that of religious or ideological indoctrination. Bartlett and Miller, for example, argue that it is erroneous to assume that religion is the main cause of violence even in the case of “homegrown terrorism” in the West. Instead, they note, factors such as emotional pull, the search for excitement and coolness, peer pressure and status or street credibility sometime outweigh the religious reasons. Following their empirical research on 68 radicals and terrorists, Bartlett and Miller concluded that,

... Especially in the case of “homegrown” young men, violent radicalization is not necessarily, or wholly, a religious, intellectual, or rational decision. There is an emotional pull to radicalization. To join the battle against the power and authority of Western states is considered risky, exciting, heroic, and taps into a counter-cultural and anti-establishment tradition exemplified by many youth subcultures, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Further, in-group peer pressure and an internal code of honour can render violence, in certain social contexts, the most obvious route to accrue status, respect, and meaning.²⁰

Similarly, Bjørgo and Horgan note that youth gangs tend to fulfill important functional needs by providing identity, community and excitement and that the inability to purposefully replace those functions may lead to the radical youth failing to leave those groups.²¹ Recording the words of a former member of an Italian neo-jihadi group, Vidino writes, “Riadh perfectly summarized this internal dilemma, adding a psychological element: ‘It was difficult to tell oneself that we were on the wrong path. In us, also in me, there was a bloody pride that prevented us from taking a step back’”.²²

In conceptualising the path for an individual out of radical mindset, it is important that their self perceptions of what they are and what they need be clear to the counsellor. The variable ways in which extremist religious views combine with each individual’s real life circumstances facilitating his or her radicalisation points to the complexity facing prison rehabilitation teams as they try to reverse the process that drove the individual into the radical milieu in the first place. Recording the information provided by a former neo-jihadi fighter, Vidino writes,

Riadh used a metaphor to explain how the deleterious combination of the words of charismatic preachers and desperation of their targets worked: ‘When I was living in Tunis one day I managed to catch a fish weighing two

¹⁸ Scilla Elworthy and Gabrielle Rifkind, *Making Terrorism History* (UK: Random House, 2007).

¹⁹ Schneider, *Transcending Violence: Understanding the Roots of Violence and Cultivating Peace in Our Nations, Our Communities and Our Hearts*.

²⁰ Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, “The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 1 (2011): p.17.

²¹ Bjørgo and Horgan, “Introduction.” See also M.W. Klein, *The American Street Gang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Tore Bjørgo, Jaap van Donselaar, and Sara Grunenberg, “Exit from Right-Wing Extremist Groups: Lessons from Disengagement Programmes in Norway, Sweden and Germany ” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

²² Lorenzo Vidino, “Buccinasco Pentiti,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 3 (2011): p. 411.

kilograms with a small pole. How could I fish such a big fish with such a small hook? Once home I understood. In the fish's stomach I found an old hook. The fish had taken the bait because it had no stamina left to fight. It had become an easy prey to catch. Like us, who turned up at the mosque with no job, no money and no love, spiritually poor and with our morale under our shoes. It took just a small hook to catch us.'²³

In addition, perceptions of intergroup (inter-ethnic, inter-religious) competition and generalised tendencies of regarding other social groups with hostility aided by low self esteem, as well as poorly developed skills in areas such as self-reflection, empathy and conflict management provide a psycho-social environment that facilitates the channeling of individual discontent and frustration into participation in radical movements.²⁴ Reversing such a process requires a careful grasp of the manner in which each individual was affected by the circumstances and/or influenced by the various radicalisation agents. The impact of the individual factors (economic, political, psychological, ideological, etc.) may differ from one person to another and hence a standardized approach that over emphasizes on only one of these dimensions e.g. the religious or ideological may facilitate the deradicalisation of some but not others. A personalised approach could help tailor the deradicalisation programme to the specific needs of each radicalised individual based on his or her unique circumstances. Where ideological and religious factors played a less significant role, political issues may be salient. Reflecting on the effectiveness of the government sponsored deradicalisation programme in Singapore, Kumar Ramakrishna writes,

Despite these commendable efforts, however, a residual conspiracy mindset still afflicts elements of the Muslim community in Singapore... despite all the genuinely innovative work of the RRG [Religious Rehabilitation Group], the underlying generalized angst of the Singaporean Muslim community – the product of both historic grievances and contemporary resentment at US foreign policy and the Singapore government's pro-US stance- remains, forming a restrictive existential envelop within which the RRG counter-ideological work must operate.²⁵

This observation points to the possible limitations of deradicalisation programmes that focus most of their attention on counter ideological work dealing with individual radicals and/or convicted terrorists and their personal experiences. Such programmes would need to be complemented by efforts aimed at addressing, to the degree feasible, the wider contextual factors that may directly or indirectly contribute to the radicalisation process itself.

Engaging the Community

For the deradicalisation efforts to be successful at the macro level, efforts are needed to expand, in Schneider's words, "the radius of trust" where individuals and groups trust one another. Schneider notes that to thrive, particularly as multicultural societies, that radius of trust must be expanded beyond one's own community to include different cultures, genders, ages and beliefs.²⁶ A few case studies are relevant as potential models in this context. The first one is the Norwegian programme designed to build trust among members of the community, enhancing resilience and inoculating the

²³Ibid.: p. 407.

²⁴Valk, Wagenaar, and Demant, "The Extreme Right: Entry and Exit." See also K. Möller and N. Schuhmacher, *Rechte Glatzen: Rechtsextreme Orientierungs- Und Szenezusammenhänge - Einstiegs-, Verbleibs- Und Ausstiegsprozesse Von Skinheads* (Wiesbaden: vs-Verlag, 2007).

²⁵Ramakrishna, "'Counter-Ideological Work' in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment," p. 49.

²⁶Schneider, *Transcending Violence: Understanding the Roots of Violence and Cultivating Peace in Our Nations, Our Communities and Our Hearts*.

community from divisive tendencies. The 'Exit' project in Norway was established in 1997 in which government authorities work together with the local communities. 'Exit' is mainly a preventative programme in which local agencies (especially the municipalities and the police) work with local communities to achieve three objectives: aiding and supporting young people who want to disengage from racist or other violent groups; supporting parents with children in racist or violent groups; and thirdly, developing and disseminating knowledge and methods to professions working with youths associated with violent groups. Local youth workers, welfare officers, teachers and police officers work directly with the youths to first develop methods and strategies for intervention and prevention in relation to violent youth groups as well as train practitioners in these. Bjørge, van Donselaar and Grunenberg observe that in such projects parental network groups prove to be highly effective for concerned parents in order to get their children out of extremist groups.²⁷ Such networks could also help the wider counter-radicalisation efforts by helping to build stable channels of communication through which empirical data of the collective "pulse" of the communities is gathered, organised and processed on a continuous basis. Such information may prove indispensable for maintaining a dynamically adaptive counter-terrorism model.²⁸

A useful variation of this model is the 'Social Cohesion Model' (SC) currently implemented in the state of Victoria in Australia. The model is based on community policing principles within a diverse and multicultural setting. Central to the success of this model is building the cultural literacy of the police. Operating in a culturally and linguistically diverse social environment, the demand for overcoming cultural and religious barriers becomes pronounced. Inter-cultural communication, at times complicated by language barriers, poses a challenge to officers who find themselves in constant interaction with the communities. Building mutual trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities is key to the success of this approach. Thus, Pickering, McCulloch and Wright-Neville point out, the SC approach to counterterrorism "utilises special legislation that is specific, temporally definite and in accordance with the rule of law and the human rights standards and expectations of a civilian police force".²⁹

Useful lessons could also be drawn from some NGO-based deradicalisation programmes at the state and national levels that have been experimented in the West which focus on both religious and non-religious ideological radicalisation. One such example of a non-governmental organisation in Germany that conducts a deradicalisation programme for members of extreme right wing groups in the country is *EXIT-Deutschland*.³⁰ *EXIT-Deutschland* does not make the initial contact preferring instead to make itself available through various media and encouraging those who may feel to be in need of its services to initiate the contact. Many of the individuals seeking its help are school or college dropouts who may have fallen prey to far right extremist propaganda and joined various such groups.

The programme focuses on a few key areas. First, to sketch a general profile of the individual and try to understand his or her worldview, reasons that motivated the individual to seek help from *EXIT-Deutschland*, the degree of his determination to rehabilitate as well as his plans for the future. This profiling helps the volunteers understand the specific areas where they could assist the individual in his journey out of extremism and related behavior. Secondly, the volunteers try to understand the socio-economic situation of the subject. "Does the dropout have a place where he can work

²⁷ Bjørge, Donselaar, and Grunenberg, "Exit from Right-Wing Extremist Groups: Lessons from Disengagement Programmes in Norway, Sweden and Germany".

²⁸ Sharon Pickering, Jude McCulloch, and David P. Wright-Neville, *Counter-Terrorism Policing : Community, Cohesion and Security* (New York ; London: Springer, 2008).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/exitdeutschland>

without danger to his safety? Or does he receive government benefits? Does he have a place to live that satisfies the safety requirements? If so, does the benefits agency pay the rent for this dwelling?"³¹ Third, the volunteers seek to identify ways to build new social networks for the rehabilitated individuals. As a consequence of deradicalisation and abandoning former peers and friends, the individual would have to rebuild social networks outside the extreme right wing groups. Finally, the deradicalisation programme seeks to assist on any psychological issues that may arise as a result of the changes that the individual may be going through. Usually the duration of the programme varies between six months and three years. In addition to the programme run by *EXIT-Deutschland*, there are also other deradicalisation programmes run by both NGOs as well as the German authorities that focus their attention to right wing extremist groups at state and federal levels.³²

Several elements of the deradicalisation programmes that focus attention on members of extremist groups in the wider community in Germany are shared by some of the relatively more established deradicalisation programmes mainly aimed for individual deradicalisation among radical Islamist detainees and/or terrorism convicts in other parts of the world. However, in some situations, the general profile of the detainees or prisoners may dictate some modifications or adjustments that would help to better tailor the rehabilitation programme to its intended recipients. That said, general observation indicates that deradicalisation programmes aimed at convicted or suspected terrorists and religious radicals could provide a contribution to efforts at reducing the threat of terrorism around the world. Summarizing the observations made on the effectiveness of deradicalisation and disengagement programmes in 15 countries around the world, a report by The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) noted that while contextual differences make it difficult to effectively measure the success of individual deradicalisation and disengagement programmes initial results suggest that they stand to enhance the overall effectiveness of counter-terrorism regimes in individual countries. The report identifies key drivers and principles of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes to include,

A mix of different kinds of programming, typically combining ideological and/or religious re-education with vocational training; Credible interlocutors, who can relate to prisoners' personal and psychological needs; Emphasis on prisoners' transition back into mainstream society, typically by providing them with the means for a new beginning and by establishing social networks away from extremism; and Sophisticated methods for locking prisoners into multiple commitments and obligations towards family, community, and the state.³³

However, while most experts would generally agree with the above mentioned "drivers" one observes that when it comes to the implementation of the actual programmes, some countries have been more successful in operationalising and incorporating these various principles in their actual programmes than others. As such, the success levels of the programmes in the various countries have varied highlighting the importance of careful planning, proper training of volunteers and counselors, adopting a holistic approach in dealing with the underlying issues and continuous appraisal of the programmes driven by the need to improve current practices, adapt to observed changes and needs.

³¹Sara Grunenberg and Jaap van Donselaar, Deradicalisation: lessons from Germany, options for the Netherlands? http://www.annefrank.org/ond_upload/Downloads/Mon7-UK-Ch8.pdf

³²Ibid. See also Bjørge and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind : Individual and Collective Disengagement*.

³³Peter R. Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries," (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) in partnership with National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2010), p.5.

Another useful model on extending deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation efforts to the community level is that of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi "Counselling Programme" runs the prison rehabilitation programme for jihadi radicals and terrorists in the country. The advisory committee of the programme is made up of four subcommittees. These are namely, the Religious Subcommittee (deals with theological issues), the Psychological and Social Subcommittee (made up of psychologists, researchers and social scientists for their expert advice), the Security Subcommittee and the Media subcommittee.³⁴ It is the work of the Media Subcommittee that is most relevant to the present discussion. The Media subcommittee produces materials used in the programme (for counseling detainees and prisoners). It also provides educational materials for use in schools and mosques. The focus of the Media Subcommittee of the Saudi deradicalisation programme is outreach and education, primarily targeting the Saudi youth. It conducts extensive research to identify the best means of reaching its target groups in the community and uses media such as the internet, radio, television and print. 'Moderation' and counter-radicalisation messages are spread through various mediums including Friday sermons in the mosques, lectures and study circles. An important message that the Media Subcommittee seeks to deliver to members of the community is that "extremists will only use you and that those that fall in with militants have misunderstood the basic tenets of Islam". The Subcommittee also makes use of the rehabilitated jihadis being counseled in prisons who are willing to share their experiences by providing them airtime on television to directly communicate with the Saudi public on the evils of radicalism and ideological extremism.³⁵

Thus, in addition to micro-level approaches such as individual deradicalisation of convicted criminals and terrorists, deradicalisation programmes need to take the necessary measures to reduce the chances of the radicals' own family members as well as the wider community becoming radicalised due to encumbrances resulting from the detention or incarceration of their bread winners. Widening the scope of the deradicalisation programme may prove to be one effective way to expand the "radius of trust" between the authorities and the concerned communities. That said, one must not underestimate the significance of the ideological factor in deradicalisation. While the contextual factors act as external factors operating at the environmental level and impacting the individuals' perceptions of the world and their roles in it, religious interpretations of the events affecting each individual may determine what he or she does in reaction to his circumstances. As the Egyptian case illustrates, a revision of the initial radical theology by the leaders of Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya and the facilitation of their interactions with their followers in Egyptian prisons played a significant part in the deradicalisation and demobilisation of Al-Gama'a and the Jihad groups in Egypt.³⁶ Radical interpretations of religious texts play an important role in the radicalisation process.³⁷ Thus, countering such interpretations with moderate and more inclusive understandings of religion is a crucial and potentially decisive factor for the success of any rehabilitation programme.

Deradicalisation in Prisons: A Comparative Perspective

Together with Islamic religious schools or *madaris* (singular *madrasah*) and mosques led by radical imams, terrorism analysts, sometimes with less than convincing empirical evidence, have often identified prisons as a hotbed of

³⁴ Boucek, "Extremist Re-Education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia."

³⁵ Ibid. See also Nic Robertson, "Failed suicide bomber turns on al Qaeda" CNN, 14 September 2007. Available online at <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/14/reformed.jihadist/index.html>

³⁶ Diaa Rashwan, "The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations " in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London and New York: Routledge 2009).

³⁷ Brynjar Lia, "Doctrines for Jihadist Terrorist Training," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008).

neo-jihadist radicalisation.³⁸ In some cases fears of potential radicalisation in prisons have had a significant impact on the nature, direction and outcome of deradicalisation programmes in those prisons. For instance, Omar Ashour notes the complications that arose in the implementation of deradicalisation programmes in Libyan prisons as authorities squabbled on whether to allow higher ranking members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) in prisons to meet with the rank and file for discussions that might have led to their disengagement and/ or eventual deradicalisation.³⁹ The Libyan case highlights the importance of having a better understanding of prisoner relations among radicalised convicts, terrorist offenders and non-radicalised prisoners serving time. For whether each individual will be counselled alone or whether deradicalisation programmes should allow or even encourage group activities or supervised discussions among members of the group are questions closely intertwined with such basic assumptions of the processes of radicalisation in prisons.

Among the more often mentioned programmes of prison rehabilitation of terrorists are those in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore and Egypt. There has also been growing attention on Indonesia's in-prison rehabilitation programmes for convicted terrorist offenders. In recent years, Southeast Asian countries have been dealing with the threat of radical Islamism mainly from the Indonesian based Jemaah Islamiyyah group (JI) that seeks to establish an Islamist caliphate across several countries in the region. Following the arrest of several terror suspects in countries like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines governments in the ASEAN region have worked to tighten security, step up counter-terrorism efforts and improve their approaches in dealing with ideological and religious extremism. In countries like Singapore and Malaysia, the experience gained from dealing with the Communist insurgency during mid to late twentieth century and the existing body of legislation that originates from that experience provided useful starting points in defining these countries' approach in countering radical extremism. One of the most important aspects in this regard has been the use of laws such as the Internal Security Act (repealed in Malaysia in 2011 and substituted with other laws specifically aimed for security threats) with their historical origins in the struggle between the British colonial administration and the Communist insurgency in the region in the mid to late twentieth century. In essence the ISA allows for indefinite detention without trial of individuals deemed threats to national security. In other countries like Indonesia and Thailand such a legal framework does not exist and thus the approach towards dealing with religious extremism and radicalisation has been different.⁴⁰ A comparative albeit limited review of the rehabilitative work in some of the above mentioned cases offers some useful comparative insights.

The work by the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore focuses its attention on designing and implementing a deradicalisation programme for Islamist radicals in the country's detention facilities. Unlike the German based deradicalisation programmes noted above where the rehabilitation clients are mainly school dropouts (or similar kinds of individuals), the profiles of most of the detainees in Singapore indicate that "these men were not ignorant, destitute or disenfranchised outcasts, and held normal, respectable jobs".⁴¹ High level of expertise among

³⁸ Zachary Abuza, "Education and Radicalisation: Jemaah Islamiyah Recruitment in Southeast Asia," in *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training and Root Causes*, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Security International, 2006), Christopher M. Blanchard, "Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background," in *Congress Reaserach Service (CRS) Report for Congress, Order Code RS21654* (The Library of Congress, 2004), Gaetano Joe Ilardi, "Prison Radicalisation - the Devil Is in the Detail," <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/radicalisation/conferences-and-events/conference-2010/--downloads/prison-radicalisation-gji.pdf>.

³⁹ Ashour, "Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformation of Armed Islamist Movements."

⁴⁰ Ralf Emmers, "Comprehensive Security and Resilience in Southeast Asia: Asean's Approach to Terrorism," *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 2 (2009).

⁴¹ Ramakrishna, "'Counter-Ideological Work' in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment," p. 45.

counsellors therefore becomes an issue of paramount significance to enhance the effectiveness of the programme. RRG counselors usually work in teams of three consisting of an Islamic religious expert, a Psychologist and a member of the Singapore Internal Security Department (ISD). In addition to their expertise in theological matters, the volunteer religious scholars also go through a seven month diploma course in counseling to supplement their skills. The RRG team counsels the detainees individually and assesses their progress periodically. Following the recommendation of the RRG and other appropriate authorities, several detainees have been released from detention and recidivism rates have been very low, suggesting that the RRG run programme to be quite effective in achieving its objectives.⁴² However, drawing from observations elsewhere in the Southeast Asian region and Indonesia in particular, Ramakrishna argues that the incorporation of reformed former JI detainees as part of the rehabilitation team in Singapore would add to the credibility of the programme and hence its effectiveness.⁴³

Former terrorists or respected former high ranking members of terrorist organisations serve as counsellors in government sponsored prison deradicalisation programmes in several countries around the world notably Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Egypt. There is growing realisation that given the high level of respect that these high ranking “repentant former terrorists” command among their followers, they are well positioned to play important roles in reducing new recruitment into terrorism.⁴⁴ In addition to helping the rehabilitation teams with the counter-ideological work in prisons, the former members of terrorist organization could also help the authorities identify the reasons that motivated them in the first place to change their ideological positions and decide to work against their former colleagues and with the authorities to counter radical views. The reflections by former Jemaah Islamiyah member, bomb maker and trainer Nasir Abbas, Saudi “failed suicide bomber” Ahmad al-Shayea and former members of the Italian neo-jihadi group Buccinasco Pentiti in their post incarceration interviews with the Italian authorities are revealing in this regard.⁴⁵

Nasir’s deradicalisation was mainly due to his disillusionment with the JI leadership and his disagreement to JI attacking innocent civilians including children in the name of “jihad”. In addition, he points to the fact that the kind treatment he received from the Indonesian police and prison authorities after his arrest was an eye opener that made him realise how misled he was.⁴⁶ Similarly, during an interview with author and former US Federal prosecutor Ken Ballen, Saudi former militant Ahmad Al-Shayea recalls how the kind treatment that he received from the American security and medical staff during his detention in Iraq following his capture had a profound impact on changing his previous radicalised position towards the United states. Al Shayea, a suicide attack survivor who was tricked into performing the act by al Qaeda operatives in Iraq without his knowledge, explains that he was surprised to see how these supposedly ‘evil Americans’

⁴²Ibid.: p. 46.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Björgo and Horgan, "Introduction.", Zachary Abuza, "The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Assessment " in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* ed. Tore Björgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁵ For Nasir Abbas’ story see John Horgan, "Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Björgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). For more on the Jemaah Islamiyah see Abuza, "The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Assessment ", ———, "Education and Radicalisation: Jemaah Islamiyah Recruitment in Southeast Asia.", Sydney Jones, "Not All Ji Are Terrorists," *The Advertiser (Australia)*, 30 June 2007. For Al-Shayea’s story see Ken Ballen, *Terrorists in Love: True Life Stories of Islamic Radicals* (New York, London, Sydney, Toronto, New Delhi: Free Press, 2011). For details on the interviews with the Italian neo-jihadist group Buccinasco Pentiti see Vidino, "Buccinasco Pentiti."

⁴⁶Abuza, "The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Assessment ".

were so kind to him while they treated his injuries. He notes that such experiences led to his disillusionment with al Qaeda and their warped ideology. Recording Ahmad Al-Shayea's words during his interviews with the former radical, Ballen writes:

Three days after Iraqi security started its interrogation the Americans arrived... Ahmad, covered in burns and barely able to walk, was stunned. The careful way the Americans helped carry him down the stairs to the waiting U.S. Army jeep was nothing less than another miracle [surviving the suicide bombing being the first one]. One of the American officers even spoke in Arabic... The Americans told him, 'Don't worry, it's all good'.... Ahmad now knew the Americans he had come to Iraq to kill had saved his life. And the Iraqis he had come to fight for had tried to kill him like a dog... The Abu Ghraib that tortured others saved him. He was treated with respect... with kindness. It was Al Qaeda that 'used me like a tool. I was a piece of rotten bait to lure a *dhub* out of his dry hole'.⁴⁷

Al-Shayea now makes television appearances and conducts interviews with researchers and journalists helping the Saudi authorities and the country's deradicalisation programme to spread the message of moderation and exposing the weaknesses of Al-Qaeda's radical ideology.⁴⁸ With little knowledge of Islamic theology, Ahmad, a school dropout who had strained relations with his father was lured to travel to Iraq by his cousin after being shown pictures of prisoner torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. His was a mission of revenge rather than ideological fanaticism. The kind treatment he received from the Americans at Abu Ghraib turned his previous perception of his enemy to its head. While religious re-education has its significant role to play in neo-jihadist deradicalisation efforts, Al-Shayea's case highlights the importance of understanding individual radicalisation paths so as to tailor more effective approaches to the individual under rehabilitation.

In many cases, Vidino observes, the process of de-radicalisation or disengagement starts with a 'cognitive opening'. And "Exactly as it happens in the radicalization process, a traumatic event could lead a militant to reflect and re-evaluate his commitment to a radical organization".⁴⁹ Narrating the post release interviews given by members of the Italian group Buccinasco Pentiti, Vidino notes how a member of the group lost his faith with his Jihadi colleagues and the movement when he observed the lack of empathy towards him when injured on the battle field in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ Amidst the indifference of most other militants at the camp "only his friend Lotfi Maaoui, another Tunisian from Milan, helped him by taking him to a hospital. 'That explosion', recounts Lazhar, "was a shock for me and also for Lotfi. We understood that these jihad things were complete bullshit". Lotfi, crying as he was telling this added: "together we understood we no longer wanted to be martyrs". This incident in Afghanistan represented, as the reformed radical put it, a "wake up call" for him.⁵¹ In another case, a discovery by a neo-jihadist from the same group as Lazhar that the Imam whom they revered so much and who got him to join the group was unable even to write proper Arabic language made him realise how easily he was fooled into joining the movement which made him decide to leave the group.⁵² Such powerful real stories illustrate not

⁴⁷ Ballen, *Terrorists in Love: True Life Stories of Islamic Radicals*, pp. 37 and 40.

⁴⁸ Nic Robertson, "Failed suicide bomber turns on al Qaeda" CNN, 14 September 2007. Available online at <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/14/reformed.jihadist/index.html>

⁴⁹ Vidino, "Buccinasco Pentiti," p. 410.

⁵⁰ While trying to assemble a hand grenade at the Derunta camp, a training site run by notorious Egyptian al Qaeda leader Abu Khabab, Lazhar made a mistake and the device exploded in his right hand, severely injuring it. Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

only the lack of religious knowledge by most of the radicals and terrorists but also the patterns of deceit that are often repeated in the day to day exchanges among members of these groups and between the low ranking members and their leaders. It is these kinds of stories and experiences that make former “jihadists” such effective agents of deradicalisation when sharing their experiences with other radicals be they in prison, in the community or on the cyberspace.

In addition to efforts aimed at engaging the terrorists in prisons and detention centres with discussions on the weaknesses of radical ideological and religious interpretations, countries like Singapore and Saudi Arabia have effectively incorporated in their well resourced deradicalisation programmes provisions for financial support for needy family members of the detainees as well as covering tuition fees for their students while their parents are away. While difficult to quantify, the impact of such measures in the overall success of the programmes cannot be underestimated. The authorities in these countries believe that if such families are left on their own without their bread winners, radical organisations could step in to fill the void with financial assistance which may contribute to the radicalisation of their spouses, children and relatives. Saudi Arabia in particular pays special attention to not only how the deradicalisation programmes could assist the families of the detainees or prisoners financially, but also how those family members could be involved in the programme itself to facilitate the deradicalisation of their loved ones while in prison as well as after their release.⁵³

Indeed, it has been well documented that one method used by radical groups to ensure loyalty and among group members as well as maintain secrecy within the groups’ activities is to intermarry group members with relatives of other members of the same organisation. Thus, while some of the male members of these family networks may be the most visible in the eyes of the authorities due to their involvement in violent activities, an entire networked family including the apparently passive members tends to be radicalised. The latter provide the logistical and other forms of support for the entire group in its operations. The Indonesian based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) group in Southeast Asia and the Yemen based al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) group are particularly known for having established this practice.⁵⁴ According to Page, Challita and Harris, in Yemen these intermarriages have created a kind of a “mujahideen society” made up of “brothers” who are often married to the sisters of other militants creating the so called “jihadi families” in Yemen.⁵⁵ In such situations when entire families are cognitively radicalised, focusing the rehabilitation efforts to only those captured terrorists or radicals in prisons and detention centres without involving the family members in the programme could be detrimental in the medium to long term, especially during the post release phase when influence from radicalized family members could contribute to recidivism by the programme graduates.

The potential consequences of overlooking the family members and relatives of radical prisoners in the rehabilitation process could be illustrated by the high rates of recidivism in Yemen. Three years following the pioneering work of Judge Hamoud al-Hitar to establish the “theological Dialogue” programme in 2002, the high rates of recidivism prompted the Yemeni government to scrap the programme in 2005. By 2009, about 200 of the released radical prisoners had been re-arrested. While some prisoners simply used the dialogue as a means to get out of jail, one could rule out the role of the radicalised members of the so called “jihad families” in re-indoctrinating the “rehabilitated” prisoners rejoined their families. The inclusion of family counseling within the Saudi Arabian and Singaporean deradicalisation programmes

⁵³ Boucek, "Extremist Re-Education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia."

⁵⁴ Sulastris Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2010), Michael Page, Lara Challita, and Alistair Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (2011).

⁵⁵ Page, Challita, and Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions," pp. 152-53.

seeks to counter or at least minimize the chances of such lapses which could prove profoundly damaging to the programmes' overall success. In addition, as noted above, in efforts to minimise recidivism of former detainees the Singaporean and Saudi prison deradicalisation programmes also include psychologists in the rehabilitation teams who are teamed up with government representatives and religious scholars in counseling the detainees and prisoners respectively. Among other tasks, the psychologists and psychiatrists in the teams monitor the progress of the detainees and prisoners and look for pretentious "repentances" so as to weed out any potential premature releases.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Deradicalisation programmes for imprisoned neo-jihadi radicals and other terrorists are a fairly recent experiment. While recidivism and other forms of lapses are not unknown, overall the record in most of the countries currently undertaking such programmes is promising. More significantly, while it is still early days for any serious generalised inferences to be made from current practice, the alternative approach of not doing anything to deal with cognitive dimension of radicalisation of inmates does not look better by any standards. Detention and imprisonment function as a form of "involuntary disengagement" on the part of the convicted radicals and terrorists. However, as Horgan points out, in most cases physical disengagement does not necessarily result in any concomitant change or reduction in an individual's ideological support or the social and psychological control that the particular ideology exerts on the individual. Disengagement is not and does not always lead to deradicalisation or vice versa.⁵⁷ Given the complex nature of the radicalisation process itself, the potential for the individual to fail to find an alternative life and social network once released coupled with the inability of the former terrorist to overcome the social stigma and psychological stresses that accompany his or her new status may contribute to recidivism. Thus, any effort aimed at aiding incarcerated terrorists to rethink their commitment to radicalism, identify alternative ways of pursuing peaceful change and reintegrating them to the mainstream would certainly be a positive contribution to his corrective experience.

In addition, in order to ensure the long term success of the deradicalisation programmes in corrective centres, there is a need to complement such efforts with robust programmes aimed at countering violent extremism at the family, communal and societal levels. From the case studies reviewed above, these measures may include for example, personal counseling, inter-religious or theological dialogues, 'community policing', public discussions on local issues of concern, and (where appropriate) regulation of religious curricula to ensure that the content of religious teachings in (public and private) schools or colleges promote coexistence as well as not transgressing or overlooking legally defined national security priorities.

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⁵⁶ Abuza, "The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Assessment ", Christopher Boucek, Shazadi Beg, and John Horgan, "Opening up the Jihadi Debate: Yemen's Committee for Dialogue," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), Ramakrishna, "'Counter-Ideological Work' in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment."

⁵⁷ Horgan, "Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis."

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